

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE BLOGGERS ROUNDTABLE SUBJECT: A COMMUNICATION PLAN FOR TASK
FORCE 134 BRIEFERS: GENERAL DENNIS ROGERS, DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF OPERATIONS AND
FACILITIES FOR INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT COMMAND; SERGEANT MAJOR DEBRA STRICKLAND,
COMMAND SERGEANT MAJOR, INSTALLATION MANAGEMENT COMMAND MODERATOR: LINDY
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MR. HOLT: Welcome. Welcome to the Bloggers Roundtable. We've got
folks lined up here ready to go. And I'd like to remind you, bloggers, when I
call your name when we get to the question-and-answer session, to state your
name and your publication, and we'll move on from there.

So, with that, I'd like to introduce Lindy Dinklage with the Army
Public Affairs. Lindy.

MS. DINKLAGE: Hi. Thank you all so much for being here again with us.
We have Brigadier General Dennis Rogers, deputy director of operations and
facilities for Installation Management Command, and also Command Sergeant Major
Debra Strickland, command sergeant major for Installation Management Command.
They both have brief opening remarks. And then, as Jack said, we'll open to
your questions. So we'll start out with Brigadier General Dennis Rogers.

Thank you for talking to us, sir.

GEN. ROGERS: Okay, thank you, Lindy.

Good afternoon, gentlemen. I am Dennis Rogers, as you mentioned, and
I'd like to tell you that I'm here on behalf of Lieutenant General Robert
Wilson. He's the commanding general of Installation Management Command. He
would like to be here himself, but he has been traveling for the past few days.

We're here to discuss the issues with the barracks that were raised at
Fort Bragg in the last couple of days to weeks. And during this opening
statement, I'd like to make some comments to address some of those points.

I am the director of operations and facilities for Installation
Management Command. It is my responsibility for maintaining barracks throughout
the Army. And in that role, I'll tell you right now, before we even start, I
assume responsibility for the shortfalls in barracks maintenance which were
referenced in the video by Mr. Frawley.

We let our soldiers down. And I know that a number of you are
veterans, or most of you are veterans, and you've served. So you know that
there's no excuse for that. We let our soldiers down.

With that in mind, I'll tell you that most of the shortfalls that were noted at Fort Bragg have been corrected. As a point of reference, the bedrooms are in very good condition -- the beds that they sleep in, the furniture that they have. The furniture is all new, and the H-back or the ventilation systems in that particular building were recently replaced.

The flaking paint conditions, though, that all of us watched and looked at are, in fact, ugly. But the paint has been scraped off and the surfaces are being repainted. The flooding drain in the bathroom was reported and repaired immediately.

That type of building is a 1950s vintage building at Fort Bragg. There are 23 more of those type of buildings remaining, and they're all scheduled for demolition within the next five years as new construction comes on line. Okay. You're probably saying, "Okay, what does all this mean? What are we doing to ensure our soldiers are housed in appropriate facilities?" I'll tell you, the senior Army leadership has directed a thorough walk-through of all of our barracks. Therefore, garrison commanders and command sergeants major Army-wide spent this past weekend, 26-27 April, inspecting nearly all of the barracks in order to determine if similar conditions exist elsewhere.

Some of the barracks rooms, however, were inaccessible due to some of the units observing four-day training holidays, and those barracks rooms (do not ?) expect to be done within the next 72 hours.

Garrison commanders and command sergeants major have made an assessment, however, that soldiers are housed in accordance to Army standards. Where those soldiers were not, where there were issues, on-the-spot corrections were made. And as a result of the further inspections that will go, if additional work is needed beyond a reasonable time, the commanding general of Installation Management Command has directed that soldiers will be relocated while that work is being conducted.

Additionally, he directed the establishment of a senior noncommissioned officer -- (inaudible) -- that's going to be chaired by the Installation Management Command command sergeant major, Deborah Strickland, who is here with us today, and she will talk here in a few minutes.

This forum that she will lead will provide a current noncommissioned officer perspective on the condition of facilities. That forum is going to meet monthly and it's going to use data collected from all of the reports. It's going to look at the things that they're getting from on-the-ground feedback and also from soldiers themselves to assess conditions of buildings that our soldiers live in.

Now, finally, that NCO forum is also going to provide their own assessment. Those NCOs will provide their own assessment of their boots-on-the-ground walk-through to determine suitability of the facility. This forum will provide recommendations directly to our CG in order to assist in strategic direction and making sure that, you know, we look at what's happening on the ground so that we can provide the best facilities possible to our soldiers.

On a final note, our garrison, we believe, has sufficient funding, and they also have the flexibility to address and correct change of occupancy due to maintenance issues. We believe the Army is committed to improving the condition of our soldier housing.

All of this, however, is taking place within the context of the largest build-up of facilities and modernization in the history of our Army. We've gone from the 1950s -- correction -- from the World War II (wood ?) of the '40s to the '50s to the VOLAR of the '70s, and we're going forward. What we're doing is trying to provide the best facilities to house and to operate in as possible.

Now, what I'll do is I'll turn the mike over quickly here to Command Sergeant Major Debra Strickland. She'll talk to you real quickly.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Thank you, sir.

Hello, gentlemen. I know that General Rogers has taken responsibility for the maintenance of our facilities, especially the barracks, in his opening statement. But I'm going to assume that at least some of you are former enlisted or NCOs, and so you know that part of that burden really belongs to us. We're most focused on the welfare of our soldiers, and we clearly know what kind of living conditions that our soldiers are experiencing. (Inaudible) -- and we certainly see it whenever we're in their barracks.

And I would tell you that, after this past weekend, we have many NCOs, including the NCOs that Sergeant Frawley actually works for, through his NCO support channel all the way through the sergeant major of the Army, who I had engaged over the weekend, and he engaged me on Monday concerning how this looks to our soldiers whenever they return, especially from a theater of war.

In my job, I travel quite a bit with General Wilson.

When we are on any garrison, part of that responsibility is I have a chance to visit even new construction, barracks that we are renovating, and clearly the poorest set of barracks that we might have on the Army installation. So I can draw some conclusions when we come back about how effective our barracks strategy is.

And I would tell you that, by and large, we have great facilities that are starting to emerge from our barracks strategy for our soldiers, and all of them see that. What we really address at Fort Bragg has to do with a lapse between the appropriate handoff in responsibility from the rear detachment NCO leadership to the garrison NCO leadership, and we've allowed ourselves to be put in this light. And so we address that very quickly. And it's unfortunate that it might give anybody the impression that's how we receive our soldiers that have just returned from theater.

So, sir, ready for any questions.

MS. DINKLAGE: Thank you so much.

And again, due to time constraints, I'm going to go ahead and go down a list of callers that I have here at the end of the line. If there's anyone who's joined the call who's not on my list who would like to go ahead and jump in and ask a question, I'll open to that, and feel free to do that. But first, John Donovan, are you on the line, and do you have a question?

Q Yes, ma'am, I am.

MS. DINKLAGE: Do you have a question to start us out?

Q I've had to bite my tongue a couple of times.

General Rogers, Sergeant Major Strickland, thank you for taking the time. I'm an old soldier, the son of a soldier, the son of a soldier, and this just reeks of failure of chain of command. And Sergeant Major Strickland, you got to that point. And it's not just the NCO chain of command.

General Rogers, I'm one of those guys who was still on active duty back when Installation Management Command -- well, the IMA -- was stood up, et cetera. And a lot of us didn't like the delinkage, as we saw it at the facilities from the people occupying them. Do you think that this is just an isolated failure, as Sergeant Major Strickland kind of implicated, in terms of the rear detachment guys just were asleep at the switch? Or is there potentially -- I mean, because we're talking about the garrison commanders and sergeants major walking through their barracks at the direction of the chief of staff. One wonders why people weren't walking through their barracks all the time, as I did back when I (owned ?) barracks of this age, and they were -- and I'll quit ranting and leave it for you guys.

GEN. ROGERS: The sergeant major has a point first before we start, Mr. Donovan.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Mr. Donovan --

Q Ma'am.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: -- I didn't suggest that it's an isolated lapse. I think it is probably a depiction of what happens whenever we fail to pass off properly through our chain of command or NCO support channel efforts. So after General Rogers has a chance to address this, I would like to provide some input.

Q Sergeant Major, let me clarify. I didn't mean that in a negative way. I was just thinking fast.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: No, I just want to make sure if anyone else might draw some conclusions.

Q Oh, absolutely.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Thank you.

GEN. ROGERS: Mr. Donovan, you were around when ICO -- (audio break) -- I should say, was stood up, and for all the reasons that they were stood up for. And more today, it was the right decision, the right thing to do.

We constantly look at our processes and our organizations to see if they're ongoing and if they're still the right thing to do. We've had a process within the Army Headquarters here in the last four to five months at looking at all of our staff processes and how the Army staff works, how IMCOM works and whether or not we should continue doing that. And a resounding "yes" has come out when it comes to IMCOM.

I will tell you what has happened during this time of protracted war is IMCOM has provided that leverage to allow the mission commander to be able to pick up his or her forces and move out to engage and then come back, so I would tell you that the purpose and the reason for IMCOM are still valid. Now what happens when you transition between barracks? The barracks are assigned over to

the unit. That unit may be a mission unit and it owns the barracks. In this case, that actually happened. That was a process ongoing. You may not know, but the unit and the garrison did walk-throughs. They identified issues and things that needed fixing, and the fixing -- or the repair, I should say -- fixing -- I'm from Alabama -- (chuckles) -- the repair was ongoing when this unit was told that they were going to come back home early. Now does that mean that they're coming back home early -- that they should come back to dilapidated conditions? No, it does not. What has to happen is there has to be viable timelines and milestones to get the identified work orders repaired to meet the redeployment of our soldiers. That was ongoing. There's not a cause-and-effect here.

Some people in -- around the country think that because of the video, we're going through all of this now and we're doing all of the inspections, and we're finding all of these issues. That's not the case. There were a number of different work orders submitted in the last six months to work on these particular barracks. And there's a number of 40 -- (background noise) -- and I'll tell you that. And there's a number of -- seven that are still open and I'll tell you that. But I'll tell you also that that drain -- the plug where the soldier's standing in the sink and trying to unstop the drain, if you look at that and take it out of context, you'd think that that's the water that was found when the soldiers came back.

That's not the case. The soldiers came back, and subsequent to their return, that's when that drain went over and overflowed. It's just like drains that happen in my house. I have to get Roto-Rooter to come into my town house that I pay here in -- here in Alexandria and I paid them money to come in and fix it. What we did is -- what happened in this instance is as soon as that condition was identified, it was repaired. So my comment to you is that, Roger, we still believe, though, that IMCOM and the auspices of its generation -- or creation, I should say -- are still valid and it's being validated by the senior leadership each day.

Now, the sergeant-major has something she wanted to say.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Mr. Donovan, while the inspection was not necessarily a result of the deficiencies that the soldier's father highlighted, the creation of our NCO forum at our Level I all of us are kind of anxious about getting information flow so that it's timely and we can all affect whatever's happening to our soldiers on the ground. And so the NCO forum that General Wilson has directed will occur allows all those garrison sergeant-majors to meet on a monthly basis.

And in spite of what other information they have about the raiding of the barracks, the construction schedule, the things which everyone at the local level talks about whenever they're explaining processes to soldiers, we want a chance to at least feel a gut reaction from an NCO that has gone in the barracks and decided that in spite of all of that, it's still an unsuitable location for our soldiers. So this is an avenue -- it was created to provide a direct avenue to the boss. So on top of all of the other data that he receives while we travel, we have some of the soldiers' input via his NCO or his chain of command -- his NCO support channel or his chain of command. So that is a direct result of what has happened over at Fort Bragg.

Q Okay.

MS. DINKLAGE: Okay.

CJ from A Soldier's Perspective, do you have a call?

Q Yes, I do.

Sergeant-Major, General, thanks for sitting down and talking with us. CJ from A Soldier's Perspective.

My main concern is -- and Sergeant-Major, I really appreciate you taking the responsibility -- or both of you because this is definitely an NCO issue. My only concern is with the NCO corps itself. With this going on now, I've also talked to soldiers from different installations who are telling me that, you know, this isn't an isolated incident and that even as far back as 2002, when they returned from the first deployment to Afghanistan, they've had to deal with these barracks issues, and they feel like the Army's turned a blind eye to them. And then you add to that -- you know, the recent issues with Walter Reed and the NCO failures there.

What are we doing as an NCO corps to try and fix this as well?

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Mr. Grisham, are you familiar with the Sergeant-Major of the Army's notes that he sends out from his office? Do you all have access --

Q I have, Sergeant-Major.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Pardon?

Q Yes, I am, Sergeant-Major.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Okay.

He has informed me that he will be sending out some guidance very quickly that's related to his impression about how this got off balance. We always have problems at the local level and the problem for me is is that we exist at a different level, and it's very hard in between for the soldiers' concerns to actually make their way here in a timely fashion. So what we have is something that happened at an installation and it -- you know, it's local. We don't hear about it and it gives the appearance to many others that we are broken.

I would just tell you we've spent a lot of effort. The entire leadership for the Army has at the forums that the Sergeant-Major provides is talking about how to make NCOs be more reactive and back in the barracks. I think some of this our soldiers really have a higher expectation of what we do now. I mean, they are performing at high levels, they're deploying in war, they're returning and they see how well one installation may address their returning warriors, and then they experience something less than that. So there has been a lot of discussion amongst the senior NCO forums about how we make this be more uniform in that soldiers can come to depend that we are doing everything that we should be doing. And that goes all the way down to NCODP sessions conducted at the unit level.

So it's progressive. I think it's getting better. And you may be the recipient of complaints or issues that -- that substantiate is happening in other locations. But the truth is is that it's very difficult to reach every soldier equally. So we have to use what's available to us and we use the same

systems that you do. You know AKO? Have you been on our AKO blog site? Q
I've been on some of them. Yes, Sergeant Major.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: You know, those are very sterile environments. But there are a couple of them that speak to soldier concerns. You know, there's the Company Commander forum, there's a Sergeant-Major forum -- almost every regiment has a forum. So we're hoping that through -- and through others that are paying attention to how much effort the NCO leadership in particular is making that we can get some of this information out to our soldiers.

You know, part of this is that the soldier either didn't trust his normal complaint systems like going through the chain of command and/or going through his NCO support channel or CNIG on post -- that he felt compelled that the best way to address this may be in a very visible medium so that we all have to respond, and we're doing that. And I believe personally that we would've done it anyway and that we're very sensitive right now to what our soldiers are experiencing. And we just have small barracks and the complaints surface out of those barracks. Hopefully you're getting some feedback from soldiers that are living in our great barracks. That's where they all want to be.

(Off mike commentary.)

MS. DINKLAGE: Thank you, Sergeant-Major.

Bryant Jordan, Military.com, do you have a question --

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Can I have a quick -- can I -- did I answer that, Mr. Grisham?

Q Yes, Sergeant-Major, you did. And to be completely fair, the majority of barracks really are great barracks. I think the problem that we have is the returning soldiers tend to be the ones that get either temporarily or on a more long-term basis -- they're the ones that kind of tend to get the lower-scale end of the barracks for a short time while they return while the adjustment's made on post. But --

MAJ. DINKLAGE: Mr. Grisham, let me tell you the SMA made himself very clear to me on Monday. So we want to do what's right by every soldier, but clearly we want to do better by the soldiers that are returning from war.

MS. DINKLAGE: Great.

Q Hello?

MS. DINKLAGE: Bryant Jordan, Military.com, do you have a question?

Q Yes, I do. Thank you very much. Now you mention that you had this planned -- you had this budgeted anyhow, as well as other projects -- programs throughout the Army. What's changing in terms of where you're getting the money and are you picking up the pace of doing this work not just at Fort Bragg, but elsewhere? And given how tight things are, where are you getting the money?

GEN. ROGERS: Okay, are you linking the repairs to the barracks to not having enough money? Is that the --

Q Well --

GEN. ROGERS: -- gist, Bryant?

Q -- I'm not saying that you didn't have enough money. This is obviously, ---- you're saying it's something that the troops came back early, so they were - they were not -- (inaudible) -- with the program. However, since this video has come out, you do have this forum now, you did spend the weekend looking at barracks across the Army.

It looks like you're going to try some -- check for speed (ph) to make the - to make the repairs that are necessary. And I'm wondering, does this mean new money injected into this? And if so, you know, where is it coming from, and how much it's going to be?

GEN. ROGERS: You know, it's ongoing, Brian (sic). What I mentioned to you is that these barracks had work orders already applied and submitted. Those work orders were being worked, as the units were - as the Rear Detachment was alerted, 72 hours ahead of time, that these - the soldiers were returning. So, they were working it already.

Now, should they have been repaired already? Yes! The milestones, as I mentioned earlier, they should have had sufficient enough time, with a gap in between, so we wouldn't have this short time period. Three weeks, after being over there for 15 months? We're not going to tell them to stay longer because we don't have the barracks prepared, we're going to get in there and we're going to work harder, work faster, and try to get as many open and fixed as possible. What you're going to do is you're going to go into the barracks and, floor-by-floor, you're going to look to see -- (audio interference) -- do that. And then you're going to say, okay, I got 15 spaces for 15 folks. Then you're going to look somewhere else. But you're not going to let them stay. But, in the meantime, you're going to continue working on it.

So did we miraculously find funding to do something different? Funding was already being applied to it, and working it. So, it's a matter of what I said earlier, we let our soldiers down. And this is not - this is not the standard that we live to, and we're fixing that. MS. DINKLAGE: Okay, Matt Burden, from BlackFive, do you have a question?

Q Yes. My question would be, when General Rogers had mentioned that repairs were made on the spot, I think a lot of folks are going to want to know who made those repairs. Was it the soldiers themselves that were responsible for it? Or did we have contractors come in and do it?

In the news media, especially in responses to the Washington Post site, there's been a lot of questions along those lines. I think it would do well to answer those.

GEN. ROGERS: You're mentioning the soldiers in this barracks making on-the-spot repairs? Is that what you're asking?

Q I'm asking who made them?

GEN. ROGERS: The directors of Public Works, and contractors that are brought in by them to conduct repairs on things that they are - that they can't work on. The soldiers - the scraping of the paint and getting down to the bare and then repainting them -- has been contracted out.

The changing out - installing the water fountains. If you noted that the water fountains were not there, they were taken down. And then porcelain water fountains were ordered for those barracks.

What we didn't do, though, is we didn't cap the pipes. So, if you understand how the plumbing system worked, the gases in vents are going to go somewhere.

And if there's an open-ended pipe, it's going to come out that way. And that's - (audio interference) - Now, we learned something from that. As leaders, a lesson learned, or an AAR point - and we in the military know about AARs - as an AAR point, we're going to make sure that we look at stuff, and look for stuff like that when we go through our barracks now.

But to answer your question, yes, we had director of Public Works people. And where they were not able to fix them, then we got contractors to come in and did the work for them.

MS. DINKLAGE: Brandon Friedman, from VetVoice, do you have a question?

Q Yes, I do. General Rogers, Sergeant-Major, I'd like to thank you guys for coming on. Like she said, this is Brandon from VetVoice.

Do we know where, in the chain of command, the fault lies? I mean, you guys said that work orders had been submitted. Were those submitted by the Rear-D chain of command?

Was the Rear-D making a good faith effort to keep these barracks maintained, and they just weren't getting the help in a timely manner? Or is it more their fault because they weren't asking the right questions? Do we know yet?

GEN. ROGERS: (To Sergeant-Major Strickland.) Go ahead.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Mr. Friedman, I'm going to try to provide some of that input.

There was a previous unit that was in there, and they - and they were required to move out. They were a Garrison Support unit that was inside that same barracks. You know, we've been using those barracks to their full capacity - whether the soldiers are there or not. And because the barracks had been addressed a couple of years ago, all of the major work that would have done while they were gone wasn't a requirement again.

So, they move out, and there was a timeframe where the Rear Detachment was documenting what the -- what the work orders were to bring that barracks back up to standard. They didn't really, I think, turn their full attention to it until they realized they had a shortfall in time, because they were - they had ownership for several other barracks and they were in worse condition. So, they were spending a lot of their energy there. Whenever they've got 72 hours notice, trust me, they hit high speed.

But, it wasn't all the Rear Detachment's issue. Our obligation is not to allow re-habitation of those barracks, from the Garrison perspective, if they're still substandard. And we have options, in the event that they're not ready to receive soldiers. So we have equal blame, and no one's real pleased

about that. We're trying to ensure we've got systems in place, again, to make sure that that doesn't occur.

But, there's no guarantee for the future, I just would tell you. It will be very difficult to accept someone's not alert to this, and prepared well in advance. The Rear Detachment had an obligation to make sure the building was ready. And we had an obligation to support them in that. And between the two of us - between the two of us, we managed to fall short of it.

Q Okay. And this is -- as a quick follow-up to that, it's also my understanding that these barracks - the people who were going to live in those barracks were supposed to be in the new barracks that are currently under construction. My understanding is that that construction is currently behind schedule. If that's true, do those contractors working on the new buildings bear any responsibility for this?

GEN. ROGERS: Brandon, the barracks are due to be occupied in the summer of '09. So, next summer they'll be on-line.

We had a question about that earlier, about schedules - about what was happening 15 months ago, then what's happening today. I can't answer that, but I'll present that question to our friends in the Corps of Engineers, because they monitor it, and manage the design and the construction of our facilities for us.

Q Okay. Thank you.

MS. DINKLANGE: Great. Bruce, from qando.net, are you still on the line? Do you have a question?

Q Yes, I am. Bruce McQuain, with qando.net.

I have to admit, I saw that in video and I was infuriated. I mean, there's no question about that. In my experience in the military, it's not the combat tours, and it's not some of the other things that we do daily that run people off, it's stuff like that.

And so, I've listened to most of the folks here talking, asking most of the questions, but I'm a little - I'd like a little clarity on something. The -- you were - Sergeant-Major, you stated there was a Garrison unit in there, prior to this Infantry unit coming back, and -

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Yes, Garrison Support unit - a reserve unit that was wrapping up their time there, yes.

Q Well, my question is, unless there was something that - dramatic that happened, they lived in the same conditions, didn't they?

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: They did. But the barracks overall was in - if you haven't walked through them, it's kind of hard to, kind of, call it. I was actually on Fort Bragg about 16 months ago, and I was in those barracks. I would tell you that they were - some of them were appalling. Part of that, because they hadn't had systems addressed in awhile.

So, we pushed money into those. They were - they were under our program. And it allowed us to address the HVAC system and to do some cosmetic repairs. Whenever --

Q Yeah, I --

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Sorry?

Q I was going to say, yeah, I served in those barracks. I remember them quite well. But, I guess my point is, this wasn't a problem that just suddenly cropped up, obviously - if somebody else was living in there, and that, and then the condition of the -- so, I assume - and this is what I get out of what you said, that there are now different processes in place to make sure that this doesn't happen again?

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Well, I wouldn't call it different processes. We have reenergized, I believe, the leadership's responsibility, and their role in ensuring that our soldiers are treated appropriately, and that we - that we stay engaged in the barracks.

What happened here was the departure of one unit, and then the advancement - or the advanced return of another. Now, they were living on the edge to begin with. But they were living on the edge - meaning the Rear Detachment and the Garrison, about getting those barracks back up to speed, because they were focused on some others that had more serious problems.

So, when everybody rolled in and tried to solve that, in the space of a short period of time, they couldn't be as certain. You know, when you - when you looked at the flooded area that the soldier was in the latrine --

Q Right. SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: -- I think the General told you that that occurred after the barracks was reoccupied. They did go through, and they flushed all the toilets, and did all the maintenance checks that would give them some feeling that things - the systems should be functioning properly.

What they couldn't replicate, and what didn't happen, was that we didn't flush them all at the same time. So you have everybody back in the barracks, and now we've got three floors worth of soldiers, all of them using their latrine facilities, and it caused the pipe to rupture. So that happened after they were back in there.

The peeling paint, that's problematic and none of us are proud of that. But it wasn't considered a life - health and safety problem, so it didn't have the same priority as systems were.

And so when you added all those things together, it looked like we totally neglected the soldiers, and you draw this conclusion off that. Nobody wants to try to piecemeal an answer to you to try to make it sound better. But whenever I say systems in place, the only new thing, truthfully, besides the fact that everyone will be watching what happens the next return -- I mean, every now and then we get a lesson -- is that we establish this NCO forum.

The boss has directed that so that we can work off of more than just statistical input, which is what we get from the garrisons that roll up to the systems that tell us the status of our barracks -- the status of any building.

What we have now is the NCO forum, and so the garrison CSM is going to make a statement in front of his peers on a monthly basis, which will -- (background noise) -- General Wilson, that will let him speak from his gut that

says, "I was in those barracks," the ones that you speak of right now, "and I don't care if it has a green rating that says it's ready for reoccupancy.

It didn't look right to me."

And then that will be provided to our senior leadership to make some decisions on before we continue to have soldiers come back here. And believe what I would tell you, and you have to feel it in your soul is not true, is that the NCOs and the officers in their team do not pay attention to them or care enough about their living circumstances. That's not accurate.

Q I wouldn't suggest that it was. No, obviously something broke down somewhere. That's what I'm trying to get to. But one follow-up question. The paint peeling was bad and the flooding of the latrine was bad. But I was actually more concerned about all the mold I saw in those pictures.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: You know, I can't really -- I don't know how many of those pictures -- I mean, you know, we have mold in all of our family housing, Mr. McQuain. That -- please let me take that back. There are different degrees of experiences with mold, and in the Southeast it's always a problem. So I saw the same video. I saw the same pictures. What I don't know is how large that problem was.

And Sergeant-Major Sheehan, who's the garrison sergeant major down there at Fort Bragg, she had been very engaged all of last week. We've been on the phone a number of times. But I never asked how widespread the mold problem was. So, now, if that started from an area that was kind of closed off, I couldn't really determine if it was in a hallway or if it was in the bathroom, which is where, you know, I suspect that it might have been connected to.

I agree with you; mold is a tough thing. But we bring in -- you know, we bring in professionals who do the air quality just to make sure we're not exposing our soldiers to problem areas with mold. And then we start to repair it. So what we didn't do is make it all look acceptable or make it all be acceptable before they got there, intending to cover all that as we worked our way through.

So I know that's not a great answer. It is what happened. And I understand your cause for concern about the mold, but I'm not real clear that it was a huge problem in the barracks, just probably a persistent one that they have down in the Southeast. GEN. ROGERS: Yeah, and this is General Rogers. I would say the same thing, Mr. McQuain. The leadership in the Southeast, really around the military, understands that mold conditions are going to exist and we have to attack it and we have to have a remediation procedure for that. Some installations actually have contracts with corporations on a constant basis. When they identify something that looks like mold growing, they get that contractor in. And it's a constant contract that is active.

So what we have been -- what has been reported from those particular barracks here in the last couple of days is that that has been repaired. So we are very concerned when we see mold because of all the other things that it brings with it and the conditions that could impact on soldiers. So thank you for that update.

Q Well, I wanted to say thank you to both of you for your sitting down with us and clarifying all this as well.

GEN. ROGERS: Okay.

MS. DINKLAGE: Chuck with North Shore Journal, are you on the line? Do you have a question?

Q Yes, I am. Chuck Simmons from America's North Shore Journal.

I wanted to ask kind of a two-fold question. The first part of it is that we've been told that one of the reasons that this particular barracks got put on the back burner was that other barracks were in worse shape. And have they been brought up to satisfactory standards?

And the second part of the question is, what constitutes satisfactory - absolutely no peeling paint, no absolutely no mold? What is the standard?

GEN. ROGERS: Well, in answer to the question about the condition of those other barracks, they were not occupied. And for us, we are focusing on the issues of barracks that soldiers are in or we anticipate soldiers are going to so we can get those prepared and/or repaired.

We are also working to demolish some of those buildings. I told you earlier there are 23 of them remaining at Fort Bragg. And they will be torn down within the next five years. So if we take the barracks off line, then we're not going to be that concerned about trying to get them repaired.

In some instances, however, we may have to use those as part of the swing space to house soldiers, so we will get those buildings repaired so we can get them ready to get soldiers to come in. And that's the issue where we said that they were in worse condition. But they were not occupied, but we're going to get them ready so that we can bring them in so they can house soldiers in the future to look at that as swing space in and of itself.

You're familiar with the C ratings. You know, those in the military, we've had C ratings forever -- you know, C-1, C-2, C-3, C-4 and C-5, once you get into the non-active status; non-active, as in you are deactivating a unit. Well, the installation status reports that we work with in Installation Management Command follow some of that logic.

But the issue that you're looking at is for us -- we're looking at -- we'd love to get a C-1, green as you could be, but we're not going to get the funding and the resources to get there, almost like when you do deferred maintenance on your car. You don't change your oil every 1,500 miles or you don't change the tires before the wear gauge says you need to change them.

So for us, we look at C-2, which is green, and it takes into consideration that, well, we're going to change that tire when it hits the wear gauge, but we're going to use funds right now to do something else, because, granted, you know as well as the rest of us that have either served in the military or in the military right now, we don't get all the money that we need, so the resources that we have, we have to make sure we provide those resources where they will have the biggest impact. So we look at that and we look at the ratings to precipitate that.

Now, nothing at all will stand in the way of health, life, and safety and welfare of soldiers and/or of a commander that thinks there's a condition that warrants immediate attention, regardless of the C rating. So I would tell you is that the final outcome is the leadership. The leadership determines if

those facilities are appropriate for our soldiers, America's sons and daughters, to occupy.

Q Well, if I could quickly follow up, I'm just curious as to what the standard is, because I could -- I'm from a higher education background. I could go into any college dorm and poke around and come up with the identical video that's out there on YouTube, probably worse. So my question is, what is satisfactory -- absolutely no peeling paint, absolutely no mold? Or are we working with a situation where, you know, there may be something that needs work, but we can put our guys in there?

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Mr. Simmons, this is Sergeant Major Strickland. Are you familiar with the installation status report or perhaps being a facilities noncommissioned officer?

Q No, ma'am.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: We have a checklist that's provided us. I've been a facilities NCO for a set of barracks or buildings on an installation before, and it feeds into a massive report that's forwarded to the Department of the Army. We call it the installation status report. And there's red-amber-green depictions on that checklist.

You walk through a barracks and it might indicate that if you have a certain amount of peeling paint, that places it in one category. It shows you pictures, you know, to make it easy for the layman. So it's not just a real simple response to you about what's acceptable. We all speak about what life, health and safety issues might be, and so you don't really have to go far for that.

Mold is clearly a health issue, and so we have an obligation to kind of verify that's not a problem. And so you have to have windows in it. There are some basic standards which you probably appreciate. But the installation status report is a fairly large volume of work, and it's compiled from across the Army. So it's not a real simple answer. If you want to know specifically for barracks, we probably can provide you the excerpt from the ISR which talks to what acceptable standard --

Q Well, I guess -- what you just said, I guess, answered my question in that somebody at some point filled out a report with pictures to guide them --

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Yes, sir. Yes, sir. I used to do that.

Q Okay.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: And we're not all created equal, because my opinion about what's acceptable can be a little more severe than somebody else's.

But, yes, sir, that's how we do it.

Q Okay. So the report on this barracks, was it inadequate? Was it up to snuff? Was it -- do you see what I'm saying? If somebody did a report on this, what did they actually --

GEN. ROGERS: Well, to be honest with you, I have not seen a report, if they did one. But I would tell you that, based on what you see in there, the mold has big concern. And the mold would be the one thing that I would trigger off right away. The peeling paint -- you know, there may be even lead base in it, but we have rules that prohibit lead-based paint from our child and youth services and our CDC area. But in order -- these are 1950-vintage buildings. We'd have to scrape a lot of paint to get all that lead out from the 1950s.

So there are a lot of things that it would look at, yes, and I would trigger and say, "Yep, there's an issue there." So I can't tell you what the ISR for this actual building was.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: Mr. Simmons, I'd like to just close that comment with our boss -- (inaudible) -- our execution arm of our operations a long time ago. He's been discussing this. Our ISR is only a yearly function, and the garrisons are going through, getting all ready for an ISR at a certain part of the year so that the Army can be provided that data.

Q Okay.

SGT. MAJ. STRICKLAND: He said that's not enough. He wants a quarterly snapshot. And so we are working towards that part of making the ISR more responsible so that we don't fall back on a year-old rating of it.

Q All right, thank you.

MS. DINKLAGE: Thank you so much, everyone, for your questions. I apologize that we've reached our time limit on this; thought we'd have a chance to get through everybody. But I think we answered the bulk of the questions.

If I could convey one thing to you, I guess I would say that the sergeant major here has been crawling out of her seat trying to get into the phone to tell you how important this issue is to both herself and the sergeant major and everyone in the Installation Management Command.

So it's really certainly something that we'll be looking at. There's a lot of, you know, end product coming out from this. So this is pretty much the end of this Roundtable. If you have any questions for me, it's Lindy.Dinklage@US.Army.mil. Jack Holt has my contact information. Again, we really thank DOD and Jack Holt for hosting this for us.

Any other questions, please send them to me. We'd be happy to update you later. We've simply reached our time limit. Brigadier General Rogers and Sergeant Major Strickland have conveyed that they would love to follow up and answer your questions, because, again, this is such an important topic for them and for everyone in the Army right now.

MR. HOLT: All right, thank you all very much. And Brigadier General Rogers and Sergeant Major Strickland, we look forward to perhaps engaging a little bit a few days down the road and maybe follow up and progress report on this. Thank you both very much for joining us today.

GEN. ROGERS: Hey, guys, take care, and thank you for coming on board.

MR. HOLT: Thank you.

END.